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For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ESSAY ON BALLAD COMPOSITION.

Continued from p. 330, No. V.

A TALE of the imagination, a recital of supernatural events, a fanciful description may equally be found in the most barbarous as in the most polished nations, and are therefore to be considered as an earlier species of poetical composition than historical Ballads, which commemorate some circumstance that evinces a more advanced and decided trait of national character. Of the latter kind the most interesting in their description, the most simple in their composition, and most affecting in their incidents, are the historic ballads of the Spanish nation, which had early distinguished itself among the principal kingdoms of Europe by actions which have justly been celebrated by the poet and the historian.

The generally irregular metre of Italian poetry, did not admit of that simple uniformity which is the principal grace of ancient songs, and there are therefore few which can boast much merit in that language; besides, the ardent fancy of their writers, unsatisfied with domestic occurrences, however brilliant, chose distant countries for the scene of their events, where imagination, undetected, might heighten the colouring of truth, and it is from this cause that Palestine and Egypt have gained additional lustre from the genius of Italy.

In France the number of native historical ballads is still more limited, as the *tournure* of expression and quaint idioms of that national language are little adapted to such compositions.

In southern Europe the fine arts had long flourished before their influence extended to England; and Poetry, the last in their train, had scarcely been heard to breathe one strain of tenderness or feeling, until the genius of Surry enriched the British language with several beautiful and pathetic sonnets and canzonets. But this delay of the muse was compensated by the several excellent little pieces of historic poetry, with which our language was shortly after embellished; and of these Chevy Chace holds the first rank, as well from the merits of its composition as from having been admired and criticised by an elegant and celebrated writer.

The following extract from an unpublished tale is given as illustrative of Historical Ballads, and in an ensuing Magazine the subject shall be resumed on elegiac songs.

THE TOURNAMENT.

* * * * * * * * * *

NEXT came a Spanish cavalier,
Whose armour blaz'd with gold,
Whose helmet wav'd with lofty plumes,
Right goodly to behold.

That year he left his native Spain,
Strange courts and realms to see,
And never did Galicia boast
A braver youth than he.

But vain his prowess, vain his skill,
'Gainst Ormisind were found,
Who at his temple aim'd a blow,
That fell'd him to the ground.

So blooms a lily fair and tall,
By some lone river's side,
Till torn by mountain-torrents' fall,
It sinks beneath the tide.

In courtly guise does Mandlebert,
Next to the charge advance,
"In sooth, most gallant knight, with thee
I fain would couch a lance."

"With me, rash boy!" quoth Ormisind,
"Then sorely shalt thou feel,
"That silken fan befits thee more,
"Than sword or lance of steel."

They back their steeds, their bosoms swell,
With martial ardour's glow,
So fierce they rush, that both their spears
Were shiver'd at a blow.

Then quick they draw their flaming swords,
And brandish them on high,
While from each casque of burnish'd steel,
The vivid lightnings fly.

They wheel, they spur their mettled steeds,
That foaming pant for breath,
And every blow from either arm,
Seems fraught with instant death.

Thus long they fought with equal skill,
And doubtful was the fight,
Till one fell blow from Mandlebert,
Unhors'd the green-arm'd knight.

So falls at length beneath the storm,
An oak that long has stood,
In proud extent and stately size,
The monarch of the wood.

Thus far'd Lord Osbert and Sir Hugh,
Who wore the crimson shield,
And eke Sir Brent, who oft before,
Made Pagan chiefs to yield. L.